



Committee on **HOMELAND SECURITY** Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Martha McSally (R-Ariz.) Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications

“Agents of Opportunity: Responding to the Threat of Chemical Terrorism”

Remarks as Prepared

Terrorists have long had an interest in using chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) agents in their attacks. In fact, tomorrow marks the 20th anniversary of the sarin attacks on the Tokyo subway, which killed 12 and injured roughly 5,500 people.

In the 113th Congress, this subcommittee, led by my colleague Susan Brooks, and ranking member Payne, spent considerable time examining the CBRN threat, and particularly the biological aspect of this threat. This morning, we will build on that work and consider the threat posed by attacks using chemical agents.

We find ourselves at a pivotal time in our fight against terrorists around the world. ISIS is better resourced, more brutal, and more organized than any terrorist group to date. We know that, given the opportunity, terrorists will acquire and use military grade chemical weapons or other chemical agents in their attacks. In fact, earlier this year, CENTCOM reported that a coalition air strike killed ISIS’ chemical weapons expert. Reports have also indicated that ISIS used chlorine gas in their attacks last year.

Ranking member Payne and I are members of the Committee on Homeland Security’s newly established Foreign Fighter Task Force. We are particularly focused on the threat to the United States from individuals who have traveled to Iraq and Syria to train and fight with ISIS and those inspired by their extremist message here at home. We must ensure we work to prevent any attacks on U.S. soil, but we must also be prepared should one occur.

A terrorist attack using chemical agents is a low probability, high consequence scenario. A chemical attack could cause mass casualties and significant economic losses. In light of this, we must be vigilant and ensure our first responders and medical personnel are ready to respond.

In 1995, the Aum Shinrikyo cult used sarin, a chemical nerve agent, to attack the subway system in Tokyo. The attack killed 12 people and sent thousands to the hospital with some degree of injury. The same group reportedly carried out an attack in Matsumoto where seven people were killed and over 200 injured. More recently, attacks in Iraq in 2006 and 2007 using conventional explosives combined with chlorine gas illustrates terrorists' interest in deploying commercially available toxic industrial chemicals as weapons. And earlier this week, an individual reportedly mailed a letter to the president containing cyanide.

I served numerous deployments in the Middle East and Afghanistan and have nearly 30 years of experience in national security and counterterrorism. As part of this service, I have received extensive training on the impact of chemical agents. I am very interested in how prepared we are here at home for a chemical terrorist attack.

We are joined today by a panel of distinguished witnesses from the medical and first responder communities. I am interested in their perspective on the current threat to the United States of chemical terrorism, the steps federal, state, and local partners are taking to address this threat, and whether the federal government has provided sufficient guidance and information to state and local officials on how to respond to a chemical terrorism event.

With that, I welcome our witnesses here today. I look forward to our discussion.

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